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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KATHMANDU 001154

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SUBJECT: ODC SEMINAR DISCUSSES EX-COMBATANT INTEGRATION

Classified By: Ambassador Nancy J. Powell. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

11. (C) On 19 October, 2008, the Office of Defense Cooperation hosted a seminar involving a core group which has addressed security sector issues over the course of multiple, iterative events. Participants included representatives from a local think tank, the Nepal Army, Armed Police, Civil Police, Nepali Congress, Madhesi People,s Rights Forum, Communist Party of Nepal (CPN)) Marxist Leninist, CPN) United Marxist Leninist, and CPN) Maoist. While the nominal purpose of this meeting was to review past security agreements, substantively the group focused almost entirely on the topic of Maoist ex-combatant integration and the government committee shortly to be formed on this issue.

Role of Special Committee

12. (C) Special Committee. The June 2008 peace agreement (and Article 146 of the Interim Constitution as amended in July 2008) specified that a Special Committee would be formed to address the issue of ex-combatant integration, either into the security forces or society at large. The agreement specified that the committee would include representatives of all &Major8 parties) an adjective which remains a point of some contention. The core group also opined that this committee would consist solely of elected assembly members, excluding uniformed personnel) although this composition has been debated in press reporting. While specific nominations for committee membership have not been made public, the group self-assessed that many of them would be called to participate due to their party position and relative expertise in security affairs.

In addition to its principal mandate to recommend a course of action for integration, the Special Committee was also explicitly tasked in the peace agreement with &supervision, control and direction8 of the ex-combatants in their cantonments. The group assessed that this additional managerial burden would require the Special Committee to establish some form of Secretariat.

Technical Committee

13. (C) Technical Committee. While not required, the peace agreement also states that the special committee may want to establish a Technical Committee. The core group assessed

that this Technical Committee would do the lion's share of the work, and would include uniformed representatives from the Maoist People's Liberation Army (PLA), the Nepal Army, Armed Police and Civil Police. In addition to its explicit role to advise and assist the Special Committee, the group assessed this technical body might also be assigned the Secretariat role (including supervision of the cantonments) along with field work (e.g. assessing the qualification and desires of ex-combatants). The group opined that the Technical Committee would develop a substantive planning recommendation which would be passed in turn to the Special Committee, the Council of Ministers, the Parliamentary State Committee and ultimately the Constituent Assembly as a whole for approval.

Other Issues

14. (C) The group raised additional issues which would confront the work of the Committees. Principal items included: defining the standard norms required for admission to the security forces, the sequencing of rehabilitation vs. integration, applicability of rehabilitation packages offered to ex-combatants for regular security force personnel who would be downsized in some future restructuring, and the role of the UN Mission in Nepal (UNMIN). Participants were generally critical of the role of UNMIN to date, and they assessed that) should the mandate be extended) UNMIN should be restricted to monitoring the arms in the cantonments, and should have no role in monitoring personnel or the process of integration and

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rehabilitation. However, the group also assessed that outside expertise and consultation would be required for the committees to function (e.g., providing case studies of countries going through a similar process).

Comment: Integration: U.S. Interests, Redlines and Strategy

15. (C) The October 19 ODC session and other political developments suggest that some form of integration between the Maoist ex-combatants and the regular security forces is likely inevitable. Consequently, key country team members met on 22 October to identify: U.S. interests related to this issue, potential redlines, and future strategy recommendations.

16. (C) U.S. Interests. The principal U.S. interest is to ensure the peace process continues. Consequently, we must encourage the talks on integration to proceed in a constructive manner, as mismanagement of this challenge is the single most likely cause of a return to conflict and/or failure of the current government. Beyond that, the ultimate arrangements may impinge on other U.S. interests in various ways. A key plank of our efforts here has been to encourage democracy, including civilian control of military forces. Should the security forces become unduly politicized or unreliable due to internal turmoil, the prospects for a free and fair election upon completion of the constitutional process are remote at best. Similarly, politicization or turmoil which significantly degrades the competence of the security forces would bode ill for an already unstable situation in the countryside, ultimately constraining our efforts at supporting human and economic development) another significant Mission priority in Nepal. Finally, Nepal has traditionally been, and still remains, a valued contributor of forces to international peacekeeping efforts. A mismanaged integration plan which produces a highly politicized or professionally defunct security sector would significantly reduce Nepal's capacity to provide this critical service.

17. (C) Redlines. To prevent the potential consequences outlined above, three major redlines suggest themselves. The first is a complete failure to integrate in any form. Many leaders within both the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and

the regular Nepal Army, for different issues of their own, would prefer that the PLA remain its own organization) albeit reassigned and renamed as an industrial security force, border security force, civilian conservation corps, etc. However, whatever the risks associated with integration, those stemming from an independent force which retains its ideological underpinnings, chain-of-command and party loyalties are immeasurably worse. No sustainable peace is imaginable when one of the political parties can resort at whim to an organized, trained (and ultimately government-equipped) body of combatants.

18. (C) Redlines, cont. Only slightly less serious is the risk of large-scale unit integration. In order to maintain their organizational identity, the Maoist may well seek to transfer People's8 brigades or divisions into the extant military order. This too would sustain an armed and equipped force with explicit party allegiance, and would additionally fracture the conventional military's structure and functions. While political compromise or concern for the welfare of their cadres (who might well be subject to retaliation in their new institutional home) may suggest some limited unit integrity, this should not be accepted above roughly the platoon level (i.e. approximately 40 personnel). Finally, the transfer of rank is likely to be a contentious issue. The Maoists have made a concerted effort in terms of training and uniform to portray an officer corps equivalent to that of the regular army, and will likely seek to laterally transfer those ranks. This too would produce unacceptable politicization of the regular army and massive turmoil within the chain of command (especially due to Maoist

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rank inflation) their cadre of officers for a 19,000 person force appears to be roughly equivalent in size and seniority to that possessed by the 95,000 person regular army). While a handful of senior-level positions may be offered as a political concession, officer transfers should only be accepted at a level roughly equivalent to international standards of military rank associated with both the scope of responsibility and the time in service (at this standard, the most senior Maoist commanders would generally translate as majors or lieutenant colonels, while the bulk would be reduced to company-grade).

19. (C) Strategy. As negotiations proceed, we should sustain our position that a Nepali solution is required, and refrain from making any technical recommendations regarding the ultimate structure of the integration arrangement. While the redlines articulated above should guide our assessment of the process, we should refrain for the moment from making these explicit, as the mainstream parties will likely begin negotiations far forward of these positions) approaching them (if at all) only later in the process. In the meantime, we should explore how our existing vocational education and training programs might be adapted to address the needs created by ex-combatants returning to society. Having this option readily and visibly available may well influence the judgment of cadres electing to choose their preferred future careers. A variety of such programs exist among the donor community, but none have been articulated in this fashion aside from the specific UN Development Program and UNICEF programs designed for those who failed to be verified as combatants by the UN.

110. (C) Once an agreement has been reached, whatever Maoist cadre ultimately enter the regular security forces will be ill-equipped for their new, traditional roles; and some kind of compensatory, transitional training is likely to be required. This too is a potential opportunity for U.S. support) at least in terms of curriculum development, if not in actual service provision. Finally, the sentiments expressed by this group, at least, suggest that UNMIN, even in a truncated role, might not be entirely welcome in this process. While the Prime Minister has informally requested that the UN SRSRG take the lead in coordinating support to

these committees and the SRSG has instituted a series of bi-monthly meetings to this end, this decision has not been endorsed by other domestic players or some international actors traditionally uneasy with the UN,s role. Consequently, we would do well to explore a donor coordination mechanism so that we could best offer complementary support both to the operation of the committees and to the execution of whatever plan they ultimately produce, should the Government fail to extend UNMIN,s mandate.

POWELL